

# **Writing Activities and Resources**



# Class Book



## Writing Skills

- Using interviewing techniques to gain information
- Developing narratives
- Using word processor to publish writing

## Overview of the “Class Book” Strategy

By engaging in this strategy, students will not only link with past generations but will also experience the writing process. Just as the novel *Wish You Well* is based on oral history collected by author David Baldacci, so also may a “Class Book” be based on oral histories collected by students from adults they know. Once the histories have been collected, each student will choose a favorite recollection, turn it into a narrative, and contribute it to a class book named, for example, *Tales to Remember*. This book will undergo the publishing phases and may be shared by distributing copies to the authors.

## Activities for the “Class Book” Strategy

1. Have students gather and record oral histories from adult family members or adult friends.
2. Have each student write a narrative/short story based on one of the oral histories he or she has gathered.
3. Allow the students to share their stories.
4. Have the students contribute their stories to a class book by editing and formatting them correctly, using word processing software.
5. Assist the students in publishing the class book, assuring that all stories are formatted consistently and appropriately.

## Assessment

Use the rubric shown on the next page to assess the stories.

### Assessment Rubric for Class Book Stories

“A”	“B”	“C”	“D”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captures reader’s attention from first sentence, paragraph, or line, making reader want to continue reading.</li> <li>• Interesting use of ideas, language, character development, and imagery.</li> <li>• Work has clarity, leaving no questions in reader’s mind.</li> <li>• Contains no errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics, aside from those intentionally used for artistic purposes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gets reader’s attention with first sentence, paragraph, or line, drawing reader into rest of piece.</li> <li>• Interesting most of the way through because of use of ideas, language, character development, and imagery.</li> <li>• Work has clarity, leaving only a few questions in reader’s mind.</li> <li>• Contains a few minor errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics, aside from those intentionally used for artistic purposes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First sentence, paragraph, or line lacks excitement to draw reader into piece. Reader may not keep reading.</li> <li>• Offers little originality in ideas, language, and imagery. Reader may lose interest.</li> <li>• Leaves several questions in reader’s mind.</li> <li>• Contains many and/or serious errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics. Errors may interfere with reading.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First sentence, paragraph, or line not only lacks excitement but also contains a cliché idea/image or no ideas or images.</li> <li>• Lacks originality in ideas, language, and imagery. Reader will not want to read past first few sentences.</li> <li>• Contains serious gaps that leave reader baffled.</li> <li>• Contains so many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that errors block reading.</li> </ul>

# Extended-Definition Paper



## Writing Skill

- Analyzing and writing about specific passages of literature

## Overview of the “Extended-Definition Paper” Strategy

One form of expository writing is the extended-definition paper. In it, the writer attempts to define a concept by using examples, comparison/contrast, illustrative description, or other methods. In this writing exercise, the students will be defining the concept of violence as it relates to greed.

In the novel *Wish You Well*, several misdeeds by the Southern Valley Coal and Gas Company are discovered. Tell the students that they will be writing a carefully prepared essay in which they outline the reasons why one person should be charged with these misdeeds and that they will define the concept of violence as it relates to greed. Show the students a list of the five writing steps as you work through the activity below.

## Activity for the “Extended-Definition Paper” Strategy

1. **Prewriting:** This is the thinking and planning part of the process. Tell the students to begin by gathering information/evidence from the book in preparation for formal charges against a person responsible for the misdeeds. Ask: Who should receive the warrant? Remind them to include the page number(s) with each note they make. Have the students make a list of examples of greed and violence in the novel. Have them write next to each example the name of the character who is involved. Who is the audience for this essay?
2. **Organizing:** In this step, have the students arrange their facts and ideas, putting a star next to the actions that are in some way connected. Are the same people involved in the conflict? In what order would you place the actions? Ask the students to decide which person or persons they want to use in their paper. Ask: Do you have enough information on this person(s)? What tone (e.g., serious, persuasive, humorous) do you plan to use?
3. **Writing:** In this step, have the students compose and combine the facts and ideas into clearly written sentences and paragraphs and write the rough draft of the paper.
4. **Editing:** In this step, ask the students to examine the rough draft to correct and improve their paper. Do you like the order you chose for the paper, or do ideas need to be moved to a different place or eliminated? Is there a better way to express your idea? Do some words need to be changed? Have them check for errors in grammar and mechanics.
5. **Rewriting:** In this step, have the students use their revisions and corrections to write a final draft of their essay.

## Assessment

Use standard rubrics for assessment, such as the trait-based assessment rubrics found in: Richard J. Stiggins and Vicki Spandel, *Creating Writers: Linking Writing Assessment and Instruction*, 2nd ed. (Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1996).

# Essay Questions and Rubrics



## Writing Skill

- Analyzing and writing about specific passages of literature

## Overview of the “Essay Questions and Rubrics” Strategy

Each activity listed below asks students to read specific passages from *Wish You Well*, analyze the text for elements of literature in response to a particular questions, and then write about those elements in a clear, well-developed essay. These activities could be used during the reading of the novel or after the reading is completed. Students are asked to focus on specific techniques that are developed within the short passages. Teachers should provide photocopies of the passages and encourage students to make annotations directly on them before they begin writing their essays.

## Activities for the “Essay Questions and Rubrics” Strategy

1. Have the students read carefully the first section of chapter 1, ending with “Go away, storm, please go away now.” Tell the students to write an essay in which they answer the following question: How does Baldacci use organization, details, and imagery to define the narrator’s attitude toward the characters?
2. Have the students read the third section of chapter 15, beginning with “The school day ended at three...” Ask the students to write a well-developed essay in which they answer the following question: How does Baldacci use language, details, and point of view to enrich the reader’s sense of Lou’s childhood?
3. Have the students read the first section of chapter 29, ending with “...her walls covering them all.” Direct the students to write a well-organized essay in which they answer the following question: What effect does the passage have on the reader, and what techniques does Baldacci use to achieve that effect? Remind the students to consider such aspects as organization, point of view, language, and use of detail.

## Assessment

Use standard rubrics for assessment, such as the trait-based assessment rubrics found in: Richard J. Stiggins and Vicki Spandel, *Creating Writers: Linking Writing Assessment and Instruction*, 2nd ed. (Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1996).

# Another Essay Question



## Reading/Writing Skills

- Identifying conflicts and resolutions
- Identifying character differences, goals, and motivations
- Recognizing/analyzing cause-and-effect relationships
- Making generalizations
- Forming generalizations
- Creating summaries
- Determining writer's purpose
- Visualizing the text
- Identifying literary elements
- Making connections
- Drawing conclusions

## Overview of the “Essay Question” Strategy

The **setting** plays an important role in David Baldacci's *Wish You Well*. After all, it is the main reason that Lou and Oz find themselves in a courtroom drama at the end of the novel. In this activity, students will be asked to focus on the setting of the novel and write an essay on how it impacts some of the characters. Using what they learn, the students will be able to make connections between the impact of setting in the text and in the real world.

## Activity for the “Essay Question” Strategy

1. Discuss with the students the purpose of the setting in the novel. Ask the question: How does it affect the way the characters act and respond?
2. Have the students choose three characters from the novel and ask them to write a well-organized essay in which they discuss the impact of the setting on each character. Instruct them to cite specific instances and examples where their characters either are in conflict with the setting or grow to understand it.

## Assessment

Much of this essay will be scored on ideas. In the following rubric, each criterion is worth ten points.

### Composing

- \_\_\_\_\_ The student provides a dynamic beginning that introduces the importance of setting in Baldacci's novel.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The student shows organization throughout the body of his or her essay.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The student elaborates on each character and the impact of the setting on him or her.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The student makes transitions between paragraphs, linking all the characters together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The student writes a strong conclusion that discusses the overall effects of the setting on each character.

### Written Expression

- \_\_\_\_\_ The student uses clear and concise word choice to describe the impact of the setting on each character.

- \_\_\_\_\_ The student has a specific voice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The student varies the beginnings of his or her sentences.

**Usage and Mechanics**

- \_\_\_\_\_ The student punctuates and capitalizes each sentence correctly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The student shows evidence of correct usage.

## General Writing Assignments

### Directions

Use the three accompanying rubrics shown below to complete one or more of these writing assignments:

1. Put yourself in the place of Lou after Diamond's death. Write a journal entry like one she might have written. (Use the "Argumentative Writing: Analytic Rubric" that follows.)
2. Write an essay explaining why or how Diamond is "funny" or "endearing." (Use the "Argumentative Writing: Analytic Rubric" that follows.)
3. Imagining that you are Louisa, write a letter of complaint to the coal company in regard to their trespassing on your property. (Use the "Business Letter: Primary Trait Rubric" that follows.)
4. Research the railroad and the coal companies of the period, and write a paper that illustrates the benefits and/or damages that they brought to certain areas of the state. Use printed sources as well as interview and Internet sources. (Use the "Documented Essay: Primary Trait Rubric" that follows.)
5. Research race relations of the time period, and apply this information to analyze and write an essay about the character Eugene. Use printed sources as well as interview and Internet sources. (Use the "Documented Essay: Primary Trait Rubric" that follows.)
6. Imagine you are one of the characters in *Wish You Well*. Choose one event in the story, and describe it from that character's point of view. (Use the "Argumentative Writing: Analytic Rubric" that follows.)
7. Select your favorite character from the novel, and explain why he or she is your favorite. (Use the "Argumentative Writing: Analytic Rubric" that follows.)
8. Compare and contrast your way of life with your favorite character's way of life. Consider such items as living conditions, emotions, and events. (Use the "Argumentative Writing: Analytic Rubric" that follows.)
9. Imagine you are one of the characters in the novel. As that character, write a letter to another character in the story. (Use the "Argumentative Writing: Analytic Rubric" that follows.)
10. Do a quote search to find all relevant quotes pertaining to an important setting in the novel. Write each quote, its page number(s), and an explanation of its importance. Choose from one of the following settings: Louisa's home, the fields, the wishing well, the courtroom, Dickens, Diamond's home, or the graveyard.
11. Make a family tree that depicts the relationships among all the characters in the novel.



## ***Argumentative Writing: Analytic Rubric***

### **Standard**

To convince the reader to consider an opinion

### **Scoring Guide**

Each category is rated 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

**Statement of Opinion** \_\_\_\_\_ of 5

- States opinion in the first paragraph
- Asserts an arguable position
- Provides a clear, specific, and elaborated focus for the essay

**Arguments and Explanations** \_\_\_\_\_ of 5

- Supports opinion with clear and compelling reasons
- Provides detailed, specific explanations of reasons

**Opposing Point of View** \_\_\_\_\_ of 5

- Acknowledges other point(s) of view
- Addresses and refutes arguments in other point(s) of view

**Tone** \_\_\_\_\_ of 5

- Chooses precise and appropriate words
- Reflects awareness of audience through use of appropriate voice

**Language Control** \_\_\_\_\_ of 5

- Makes few or no errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

**Total:** \_\_\_\_\_ of 25

## ***Business Letter: Primary Trait Rubric***

### **Standard**

To write a clear, well-organized business letter for a specific audience.

### **Criteria**

- Clear articulation of writer's purpose and expectations
- Awareness of audience as expressed through appropriate choice of language, tone, and conventions of formal correspondence

### **Scoring Guide**

- 5** The letter has a clear purpose and intended audience. The content is clearly written and reflects elaboration of ideas and specific details. Ideas are well organized, making it understandable to the reader. The tone is appropriate to the audience. There are no language-usage errors. The format employs conventions of business writing, including appropriate letterhead.
- 4** The letter has a clear purpose and intended audience. The content is clear and well organized but lacks appropriate elaboration and detail. The tone is appropriate to the audience. There may be a few minor language-usage errors. The format employs conventions of business writing, including appropriate letterhead.
- 3** The purpose of the letter is somewhat unclear, although information is provided. The letter is organized, although content may be undeveloped and/or contain irrelevant information. The letter contains some errors in language usage, and the use of appropriate tone may be inconsistent. The format may contain errors in presentation.
- 2** The purpose of the letter is not clear. The organization and language usage may impede communication. The format is not standard for business.
- 1** The letter lacks a clear purpose. It lacks organization. The language is inappropriate and the format is incorrect.

## ***Documented Essay: Primary Trait Rubric***

### **Criteria**

- Thesis statement
- Synthesis of information
- Evidence of research
- Correct documentation
- Awareness of audience
- Language control

### **Scoring Guide**

- 6 Elaborated Discussion.** Essay has a clear thesis and includes a broad range of researched information. Information, ideas, and relationships are well developed, with explanations and supporting details. Sources are appropriately documented. The paper demonstrates strong language control, and voice/tone are appropriate for audience and topic. There are almost no mechanical and usage errors.
- 5 Developed Discussion.** Essay includes a broad range of researched information. Information, ideas, and relationships are explained and supported. Sources are appropriately documented. Paragraphs are well formed, but the essay may lack an overriding sense of purpose, audience, or cohesion. Essay demonstrates good language control but may not be as strong as a “6” paper. There may be a few errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure, but they do not interfere with communication.
- 4 Discussion.** Essay includes a broad range of information, but information, ideas, and relationships may lack development. Essay may contain a few errors in documentation. Paragraphs may be well formed, but the essay lacks an overriding sense of purpose, audience, and cohesion. There may be consistent errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure, but they do not interfere with communication.
- 3 Undeveloped Discussion.** Essay includes a broad range of information and some of the ideas or pieces of information are related. The ideas may be confusing, contradictory, out of sequence, illogical, and/or undeveloped. Essay may contain consistent errors in documentation. Essay lacks a sense of purpose, audience, and cohesion. Generally, the writing demonstrates weak control of such elements as word choice and organization. Errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure occasionally interfere with communication.
- 2 Attempted Discussion.** Essay includes limited range of information. The ideas are confusing, contradictory, out of sequence, illogical, and undeveloped. There are few explanations or details. Documentation may be missing or error-ridden. Errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure may interfere with communication.
- 1 Listing.** Essay lists pieces of information on the same topic, but does not relate or clearly connect these pieces of information to each other. No outside sources are used. Consistent errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure interfere with communication.

# Newspaper Article



## Writing Skill

- Developing technical writing skills

## Overview of the “Newspaper Article” Strategy

In this activity, the students will write newspaper articles that “report” the ending of the book, choosing to focus on a particular aspect of it. In the process, they will answer *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how*. They will “interview” characters involved in the plot and/or real persons who may be “experts” on the chosen aspect and are able to offer insights into it. They will create a writing style appropriate to a newspaper story.

## Activity for the “Newspaper Article” Strategy

1. As preparation for the activity, have the students clip out and bring in several short newspaper articles that report a national or international event. Have them write down the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how* of their articles.
2. Select some of these articles to be shared with the class, discussing the general characteristics of good headlines, good lead sentences/paragraphs, paragraphing, and how the writers incorporated the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how* in their stories.
3. Next have the students choose the subject of the newspaper article they will write about the ending of *Wish You Well*: they may choose to write about the miraculous recovery of Amanda, the death of Louisa, the marriage of Amanda and Cotton, Oscar as a baseball player, or the results of the trial.
4. Have the students **gather the facts** (Step 1). Remind them to
  - answer the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how*
  - pretend to interview characters who are involved in the story or individuals who may be experts on the chosen subject
  - be sure to write down an interviewee’s exact words if they plan to quote.
5. Have the students **write a lead** (Step 2). Tell them to
  - write the first sentence or paragraph of their news story
  - be sure this first sentence or paragraph tells the basic idea of the story and grabs the attention of the reader.
6. Have the students **write the body of the story** (Step 3). Ask them to
  - fill in the details about the idea presented in their first paragraph or sentence.
7. Have the students **write a headline for the story** (Step 4). Challenge them to
  - compose a headline that is interesting enough to catch the reader’s attention immediately.

## Writing Prompts

1. What do you believe is the cause of Amanda's illness? How do you feel that she will be able to overcome her situation? Cite events in chronological order, and discuss the progression of her physical impairment to its present state.
2. Compare and contrast the school environment experienced by Lou and Oz. How is their new school like and unlike their former school? How are they treated by their new classmates? How does Lou adapt to the changes? What advice do you feel that Lou and Oz should be given to help them access what they need academically?
3. Discuss the children's adventure as they traveled to Dickens. Why is it important for Lou to go through so much trouble to get to Dickens? What are the basic lessons learned by the children from their escapade?
4. There are obviously different levels of poverty in the towns in and around Louisa Mae Cardinal. In a well-written paper, discuss the economic situations of at least four people in the story. How do their issues differ from the issues faced by Louisa? Is there a solution to the problem that will satisfy all of the persons concerned?
5. Tragedy strikes Lou in several different forms. In a well-written paper, validate this statement by using specific examples from the novel.
6. Is it possible that the story told by Diamond about the wishing well is in some way connected to rumors about Jack Cardinal's parents? Do you believe that Diamond ever used the well?
7. At one point in the story, the people on the mountain show an enormous amount of support for one of their own. What has happened? Discuss the cause of the need for the support and the implications the actions may have on Lou.
8. What is the significance of the letter written by Jack Cardinal when he was fifteen? What is the relevance of the letter to Lou and Louisa? What questions are answered by reading the letter?
9. In the midst of confusion, Lou's assistance in bringing a child into the world touches the heart of two unlikely people. Who are they? How will the relationship with these people change?
10. Write an ending to the novel that will explain what happens to George Davis after the trial has ended. Be sure to include all of the characters needed to bring closure to the person he has become at the end of the novel.
11. Louisa explains to Lou that "she must learn the land" before she can write about it. At which point in the story do you believe Lou achieves this goal? Cite specific examples from the novel to support your belief.

(Teacher's note: Papers written in response to these prompts can be assessed by using general rubrics such as those on the following pages.)

# Secondary English Writing Rubrics

## Composing Rubric

- Score 4: The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control of the composing domain's features. The piece is generally unified in that all of the parts contribute to the creation of a dominant impression or idea. The sharply focused central idea is fully, but not exhaustively, elaborated with key examples, illustrations, reasons, events, and/or details. In all successful responses, layers of elaboration are present. Surface signals, such as transitions, logically connect their respective statements into the whole of the paper. In all types of writing, a strong organizational plan is apparent. Any minor organizational lapses that occur do not significantly detract from the presentation. The writing provides evidence of unity by exhibiting a consistent point of view (e.g., not switching from "I" to "you"), a lack of digressions, appropriate transitions both within paragraphs and across the entire piece, the presence of careful logic, and a strong lead and closure.
- Score 3: The writer demonstrates reasonable, but not consistent, control of the composing domain's features; the writer may control some features more than others. The clearly focused central idea is purposefully elaborated with key examples, illustrations, reasons, events, and/or details. Occasionally, some thinness or unevenness in elaboration may occur. In all types of writing, an organizational plan is apparent. Any minor organizational lapses that occur do not significantly detract from the piece. Although there may be occasional lapses in coherence or cohesiveness, unity is evidenced by the fact that few, if any, digressions or shifts in point of view occur. Transitions are, on the whole, appropriate. The opening and closing show some skill but not the sophistication of a 4 performance.
- Score 2: The writer demonstrates inconsistent control of several features, indicating significant weakness in the composing domain. At this score point, ideas often compete, or no one idea emerges as central. Even if a single idea dominates, the paper may lack focus because of little or no elaboration. The paper may be a list of general, underdeveloped statements, or it may be the skeleton of a narrative. In the case of persuasive writing, it may consist of a few unelaborated reasons accompanied by inappropriate attempts (begging, pleading, negotiating) to persuade. Typically, the writer extends ideas with a few brief details and moves on, though chunks of irrelevant material may appear as well. Often, no more than a hint of organization is apparent. Even though an opening and closing may be present, the lack of a logically elaborated central idea prevents unity from emerging.
- Score 1: The writer demonstrates little or no control of most of the composing domain's features. The focus on a central idea is lacking, or the piece is so sparse that the presence of a clear focus is insufficient for it to earn a higher score. Typically, the writing jumps from point to point without a unifying central idea. No overall organizational strategy is apparent. The writing seems haphazard, and sentences can be rearranged without substantially changing the meaning. Bare statement is the norm, but even in responses that are several pages long, no purposeful elaboration is present.

## Written Expression Rubric

- Score 4: The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control of the written expression domain's features. The result is a purposefully crafted message that the reader remembers, primarily because its precise information and vocabulary resonate as images in the reader's mind. Highly specific word choice and information also create a purposeful tone in the writing and enhance the writer's voice. If metaphors, similes, personification, or other examples of figurative language are present, they are appropriate to the purpose of the piece. The writer repeats or varies sentence construction for effect and appropriately subordinates ideas and embeds modifiers on a regular basis, resulting in a rhythmic flow throughout the piece.
- Score 3: The writer demonstrates reasonable, but not consistent, control of the written expression domain's features. On the whole, specific word choice and information cause the message to be clear; occasionally, a few examples of vivid or purposeful figurative language may be present. Along with instances of successful control, some general statements or vague words may be present, flattening the tone and voice of the piece somewhat. Overall, the writing is characterized by a smooth rhythm created by the effective use of normal word order and competent variation in sentence length and complexity. An occasional awkward construction or the lack of structural complexity is not distracting.
- Score 2: The writer demonstrates inconsistent control of several features, indicating significant weakness in the written expression domain. Some specificity of word choice might exist, but generally the piece is written in imprecise, bland language. As a result, the writer's voice rarely emerges. The selection of information may be uneven and/or consist of an attempt to tell everything that the writer knows about a topic. A relative lack of sentence variety may make reading monotonous, and occasional awkward constructions may be distracting enough to make the writer's meaning unclear. While a few brief rhythmic clusters of sentences may occur, an overall sense of rhythmic flow is not present.

Score 1: The writer demonstrates little or no control of most of the written expression domain's features. Both word choice and information are general, vague, and/or repetitive. A lack of sentence variety makes the presentation monotonous. The existence of several extremely awkward constructions reduces the paper's stylistic effect. The writer's lack of control of vocabulary and information prevents both tone and voice from emerging.

### **Usage/Mechanics Rubric**

- Score 4: The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control of the domain's features of usage/mechanics. The writing demonstrates a thorough understanding of usage and mechanics. The author demonstrates capitalization, punctuation, usage, and sentence formation and applies the structural principles of spelling. A few errors in usage and mechanics may be present; however, the writer's control of the domain's many features is too strong for these mistakes to detract from the performance.
- Score 3: The writer demonstrates reasonable, but not consistent, control of most of the domain's features of usage/mechanics. The writing demonstrates a basic understanding of usage and mechanics. For the most part, the author appropriately applies both the rules of capitalization, punctuation, usage, and sentence formation and the structural principles of spelling expected of high school students. Most of the errors contained in the piece are not elementary ones.
- Score 2: The writer demonstrates inconsistent control of several features, indicating significant weakness in the domain of usage/mechanics. Evidence of the author's knowledge of features of this domain appears alongside frequent errors. In terms of both usage and mechanics, the writer inconsistently applies the rules of capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, and sentence formation. Often, the writing exhibits a lack of control of tense consistency, meaningful punctuation, and the principles of spelling, thus making it difficult for the reader to follow the writer's thought. The density of errors that emerges across features outweighs the feature control present in the paper.
- Score 1: The writer demonstrates little or no control of most of the domain's features of usage/mechanics. Frequent and severe errors in usage and mechanics distract the reader and make the writing very hard to understand. Even when meaning is not significantly affected, the density and variety of errors overwhelm the performance and keep it from meeting minimum standards of competence.